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Come To Your Senses!

- Smell is animal's version of writing. It allows them to communicate in the absence of the sender.
- Dogs can pick between identical twins based on scent.
- Platypus and Echidna can see ultraviolet light in their visual spectrum.
- Dogs and cats see in subdued colour, similar to a person with blue-green colour blindness. In other words they see shades of violet, blue and yellow rather than black and white.
- Ruminants can see red, yellow and orange better than blues and greens. So a bull can see a red rag!
- Horses, sheep and pigs all use facial recognition to identify individuals. Sheep can remember up to 25 sheeepy faces for more than 12 months.
- Dogs can smell fingerprints 6 weeks after they are placed on glass.
- Dogs and cats can see TV, but the image will often flicker.
- It is estimated dogs can smell butyric acid (a component of sweat that smells like dirty socks) at 1 millionth of the concentration people can ([see side box 2](#))
- If humans have 20/20 vision cows and pigs have 20/200 vision. In other words humans can see at 200m what a cow needs to be within 20m to see. Horses would need to be within 30m and a dog 85m.



What Is Ageing?

Stinky Sock Smell

Butyric acid is a component of sweat that smells like sweaty socks.

Dogs can smell it at 1 millionth of the concentration that we can.

To put that in perspective if a quarter of a teaspoon of the stuff was released in a building we could smell it at the window at the point of release.

A dog could smell it all over a city the size of Adelaide, and to a height of about 100m.

To paraphrase Oscar Wilde "The only thing worse than getting old, is not getting old". We hope to make it in to old age for ourselves, and our pets.

In the wild humans are designed to live to about 30 years of age: dogs and cats 4 or 5. To make it past that we need to make some adjustments.

So what changes? In humans our body runs at a given speed, governed by our metabolic rate. The higher the rate, the more energy we burn. That rate drops between the ages of 25 and 35 years of age by 70%. In other words if we exercise and eat the same amount at 35 as we did at 25 we get fatter. This same change appears to occur in dogs and cats from about 4 to 7 years of age.

Now add to that we as humans we are genetically programmed for a James Dean life style: to live hard and fast just long enough to reproduce. Then we are expendable to the species. As such people intrinsically crave survival foods, not long term health foods (in particular high fat foods and salt). Again this is reflected in our pets.

So to make it to old age we need to make changes as we go along, to adapt to this changing environment working within our bodies. Our pet's dietary, exercise and social needs change throughout their lives.



Positive Changes For Older Pets

Make sure your pet is not overweight and gets plenty of exercise. For dogs take them for a walk. For cats try moving their food bowl to new locations so that they go to look for them, or throw toys and encourage them to chase them.

Feed an age appropriate diet. As pets age their dietary needs change. An appropriate amount of an appropriate diet is crucial to their continuing long term health. These days there are diets tailored to all pets life stages, as well as to help treat many common medical conditions

Changes in behaviour can be indications of physical or behavioural disease. Dogs do get dementia. However, if your pet is suddenly weeing on the carpet, it may be diabetes. If they are crying in the hall way at night, they may be losing their eyesight. Many behavioural problems can be treated, and may be an indication of other problems that need addressing.

For these reasons we now recommend all older animals receive a health check every 6 months rather than every 12 months. As our pets age things can change more quickly.

Arthritis is common in all domestic animals. Cats that are more reluctant to jump than they used to be, and dogs that are slow to get up in the morning may have arthritis. Rabbits may start walking rather than hopping. We now have a wide range of treatments for joint disease. It is also important that older animals sleep in warm draught free environments. A range of conforming beds that mould around joints for better support are available.

- Don't let your pets get fat.
- Keep them active.
- Feed an age appropriate high quality diet.
- Provide a warm supportive bed.
- Bring older pets in for a check up every 6 months.
- Don't neglect dental care.
- Behavioural changes may be significant. If you are not sure what they mean give us a ring!



Meet The Unicorn

The Unicorn has held a mythical power for many thousands of years. A both ferocious animal, and symbol of love, whose horn could cure all sorts of ills and disease (Unicorn horn when sold was in-fact most likely the horn of the Nar-whal, a frankly slightly less attractive proposition, pictured below. Cute in its own way but possibly not a mythical image of love!).

The Arabian Oryx meets so many of the criteria for a unicorn, it has been described as the “prototype” of the creature. The Oryx is however as beautiful as the mythical Unicorn.

Aristotle described the Arabian Oryx as a one-horned animal but he must have been describing it side-on as it has two horns that can reach 75cm long.

Originally native to the Arabian Peninsula (Yemen, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, UAE, and Saudi Arabia), by the 1970's it had been exterminated in the wild. Happily it is now being re-introduced to its native habitats from zoo's.

The Oryx can also detect rainfall from some distance, which must have added to its mythical qualities in ancient times. Due to its excellent sense of smell, it can locate rainfall from up to 80km.

As a desert animal they have developed a very unusual mammalian skill, in being able to raise their core body temperature to decrease perspiration and conserve water. Most mammals would develop fatal cell damage if this were to occur.

